

16 January 1973

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MEMORANDUM FOR: Members of the Records Management Board

SUBJECT : List of Key Documents for Agency Annual Report

REFERENCES : a. Memorandum from Executive Director-Comptroller to Deputy Directors dated 26 May 1972, Subject: Information Control--Archives, History, and Records

b. Memorandum from Executive Director-Comptroller to Deputy Directors dated 3 July 1972, Subject: Agency Annual Report

1. This memorandum provides supplemental guidance as to what documents and files should be included in each component's submission, plus additional background information on the relationship of the key documents lists to the Agency's Archives and History programs.

Legal Requirement for Archives

2. In recognition of the obligation of a democratic government to give an accounting of its performance to the citizenry, Congress has enacted legislation to ensure that records no longer useful for administrative or operational purposes not be destroyed until they had been appraised for possible historical interest and research value.

3. The basic law governing the disposition of government records is the Federal Records Act of 1950 (PL 81-754), which requires the head of each agency to "cause to be made and preserved records containing adequate and proper documentation of the organization, functions, policies, decisions, procedures, and essential transactions of the agency and designed to furnish the information necessary to protect the legal and financial rights of the Government and of persons directly affected by the agency's activities." This law places the function of issuing records disposal regulations under the Administrator of General Services and empowers him to inspect the records of any Federal agency and to obtain disposal reports from them.

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5. NARS publishes guidelines from time to time in the form of General Records Schedules, which deal with the disposition of certain types of records common to many governmental organizations. Permissive in character, they are designed, i.e., to throw further light on the categories of records which must be retained indefinitely or must be considered for retention. Additional guidance can be obtained from NARS through the submission of specific requests for disposal authority (Standard Form 115).

Mechanism for Identifying and Controlling Records of Archival Value

6. Records Control Schedules, prepared for each major component, are employed by the Agency to stipulate the various retention periods for all classes of records and to provide for their orderly retirement or disposal. A newer device, the Records Retention Plan, complements the Records Control Schedule by identifying record types which should be preserved for their historical value and, for each component, by listing files which are believed to meet the stated criteria.

7. Records which must be retained indefinitely tend to fall into two general classes--those which must be preserved on an across-the-board basis and those where the Agency is to be selective. Retention of such records as Agency regulations, finished intelligence publications, disseminated information reports, and published maps is both all-inclusive and mandatory. All such items must be preserved and procedures have been or will be developed to provide for their orderly retirement to Archives. For some categories of records, however, the ultimate disposition of specific documents, file units, films, and other record media is dependent upon an appraisal of their worth. Most subject files and project files would seem to fall within this class.

8. It is Agency policy that the Archives should consist of a relatively small and manageable body of essential recorded experience. The screening of the great quantities of records which must be appraised before destruction can be authorized is, of course, a monumental task but not an impossible one if the work is decentralized and performed on an annual basis. The preparation of the key documents list is therefore

in one sense a first-step review of Agency records, pinpointing those which provide evidence of the organization, functions, policies, decisions, procedures, operations, or other Agency activities (evidential value), or are of enduring interest because of the informational value of the data contained therein.

Relation to Agency History

9. Agency histories prepared in the past have, for the most part, been the history of specific components. The emphasis is to be shifted to event-oriented, rather than organization-oriented histories. Future histories will therefore deal with important Agency activities and operations, analyzing the ways in which the various elements of the Agency worked together to produce the overall contribution to the operation in question. The new version of the annual report is designed to suffice as an annual update to the sundry component histories. The key document list, in this sense, serves as a source bibliography for the annual component history update and, at the minimum, should adequately document the achievements and programs cited in each component's narrative contribution to the annual report. But beyond this, the future needs of Agency historians in identifying and locating source materials for the preparation of event-oriented histories should also be anticipated and, insofar as possible, accommodated.

Selection of Key Documents

10. The term "documents" should be construed to broadly encompass recorded information, usually textual, in any format. Rather than individual documents, it may be appropriate in many instances to include entire file unit folders (subject, project, contract, etc.). Other record media materials may also merit inclusion (e.g., photographic film, briefing displays).

11. Storage of record materials under the prescribed environmental conditions is costly, and the larger the accumulation the more difficult it becomes to arrange, inventory, and retrieve. Insofar as it is consistent with Government-wide policies and guidelines, it is the goal of the Agency to limit its archival holdings to the "cream of the crop"--the truly significant and precedent-making materials. (NARS' experience indicates that only 2-5 per cent of all records of the Federal Government is of such enduring value as to merit preservation.) To qualify as "significant," the topics treated by the documents should have had a substantial impact on foreign policy initiatives and objectives, represented technological breakthroughs or intelligence coups, or had a marked effect on component activities, missions, or employment of resources. The importance may have derived from the sheer magnitude (human and material resources) of the undertaking, or because it drastically altered the way things are done (new collection systems), or because it reflected

a major shift in mission emphasis (task team activities). Failures and aborted projects, if they were of critical importance or represented major commitments of resources, should be documented along with the successes.

12. Once it has determined which happenings, trends, and developments have been important enough to warrant mention in the annual report--and, by extension, worthy of documenting in the Agency Archives--the task remains of selecting the particular documents, file units, etc., needed to adequately describe and explain them. Generally speaking, priority should be accorded documents of general scope over documents of particular scope. Careful consideration should be given to records which deal with broad policies and procedures, summaries of experiences and actions, overall direction and major phases of programs, principal trends, and similar matters of broad functional significance or historical interest. To be complete enough to satisfy the needs of historical researchers--Agency historians and, perhaps at some distant time in the future, private researchers--the documentation should explain, at the minimum, why an action was taken, preliminary planning, executive decision points and authority, implementation steps, progress reports, and post mortems, if any.

13. It would serve no worthwhile purpose to suggest the number of key documents appropriate for any particular component's contribution. The length of a component's list could be expected to vary widely from year to year in direct relationship to its activities. It is anticipated, however, that the higher the component is in the Agency command hierarchy, the larger the percentage of its records that would meet the criteria established for key documents.

14. The following topics--the list is merely suggestive and is by no means intended to be exhaustive--might be expected to appear in annual report contributions and thereby require coverage in the key document section:

- ADP planning and implementation
- R&D breakthroughs
- Internal reorganizations
- Covert action projects
- Budget trends
- Shifts in coverage or emphasis (subject, area)
- Establishment and accomplishments of task forces
- Responses to major new requirements (targets, functions)
- Planned or implemented changes in collection, processing, or production
- Major improvements in efficiency and productivity of on-going activities
- Special, nondisseminated studies prepared in response to requests from high-level policymakers

Intelligence coups
Impact of local developments on overseas operations
Major revisions of agreements and procedures in the support area
Changes in relationships within the intelligence community, with Congress, with the Executive Office of the President

Retirement to Archives

15. Components are urged to ensure that key documents and file units identified in the annual report are flagged for deposit in the Agency Archives for permanent retention once they have become non-current. There are certain techniques successfully employed by other agencies which you may wish to consider for adoption. Among these are: the use of special colored file folders for materials deemed of archival value; the marking of each file folder, whether it contains permanent or temporary records, with disposition instructions; and the storage of permanent records in separate safe or file cabinet drawers, with appropriate labels on the drawers.

16. When, as is frequently the case, a single file folder contains both documents of enduring value and others of only transitory interest, an effort should be made to purge nonpermanent records from the file prior to its retirement to Agency Archives. This task can be simplified if the practice is followed of filing permanent records on one side of the folder and temporary records on the other. One agency (TVA) uses a system of dual folders for file units, one for permanent records and one for nonpermanent records.

17. Permanent retention records, whether they are individual documents or file units, should, whenever possible, consist of clean originals. Microfilm copies, verified for completeness and accuracy, are equally acceptable--indeed, in the case of bulky files, preferred. (Federal Property Management Regulations, Subchapter B, Subpart 101-11.5 should be consulted for microfilm standards for permanent records.)

18. The timing of the transfer of permanent records to the custody of the Agency Archives should be governed by the component's reference requirements. While in current use, they should, of course, be retained by the component, and not transferred to Archives until such time as they become noncurrent. If the records are not in active use but it is probable that the component will have occasion to consult them, it is advisable to deposit them in the Agency Records Center, which is better equipped to provide reference service than is Archives, as an intermediate step, scheduling them for transfer to Archives at a later date.

19. For specific guidance on questions not covered in this paper, addressees are referred to the Historical Staff, extension or the Agency Archivist, extension

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